

The Honorable Carolyn Maloney
Chairwoman, House Committee
on Oversight and Reform
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Quigley
Chairman, House Committee on
Appropriations, Subcommittee
on Financial Services and
General Government
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman, House Committee
on Veterans Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gary Peters
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris VanHollen
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Appropriations, Subcommittee
on Financial Services and
General Government
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Veterans Affairs
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable James Comer
Ranking Member, House Committee
on Oversight and Reform
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steve Womack
Ranking Member, House Committee
on Appropriations, Subcommittee on
Financial Services and General
Government
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mike Bost
Ranking Member, House Committee on
Veterans Affairs
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rob Portman
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Homeland Security and Governmental
Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Cindy Hyde-Smith
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Appropriations, Subcommittee on
Financial Services and General
Government
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jerry Moran
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on
Veterans Affairs
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510



Archivist of the
United States

October 14, 2022

Dear Chairs and Ranking Members:

I am writing to provide you with an update on the ongoing efforts to eliminate the backlog of requests for records at the National Archives and Records Administration's (NARA), National Personnel Records Center (NPRC).

I am pleased to report that the NPRC has returned to its pre-pandemic level of service for requests of military service separation documents. NPRC prioritized servicing requests for separation documents, because they are typically needed by veterans and their dependents to prove eligibility for a variety of benefits. NPRC currently services approximately 15,000 separation document requests each week, and the median response time is five days. Response times will continue to improve during the first quarter of FY 2023.

As I noted in my last letter, requests at NPRC fall into two categories: requests for separation documents, which account for about 60% of new requests; and other requests, which account for about 40% of new requests. Since directing all staff to return for on-site work in March of this year, NPRC has reduced its overall backlog from 603,000 to 437,000 requests. During this time, NPRC received approximately 650,000 new requests and reduced the backlog by 166,000 requests, for a total of 816,000 requests serviced in the past six months.

We have met our goal with separation document requests and, overall, much progress has been made. We have more to do to eliminate the entire backlog, which includes a variety of other requests, including those from researchers and genealogists, many of which are complex and involve extensive redactions of personal privacy information and other actions beyond a simple record reproduction. We have relied heavily on contract labor support to eliminate the separation document backlog, and we are currently taking action to bring in additional contractors to support other aspects of NPRC operations. We estimate it will take six months to achieve full staffing and one year of operating at our full staffing level to resolve the entire backlog.

NPRC is also taking steps now to prepare for the anticipated surge of records requests from the recent enactment of the Honoring our Pact Act and the Camp Lejeune Justice Act.

The Honoring our Pact Act provides benefits to veterans exposed to toxic burn sites. In anticipation of the passage of the Act, NPRC collaborated with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to identify approximately 160,000 responsive records. To prepare for the expected

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increase in VA claims, NPRC is retrieving these records and providing them to the VA for digitization. The project began in August and to date we have responded to more than 97,000 of the 160,000 Pact Act related records requests we expect to receive from the VA.

The Camp Lejeune Justice Act established a federal cause of action for individuals and families affected by exposure to water contamination at Camp Lejeune, NC between 1953 and 1987. This Act has increased NPRC reference activity over the past few months. NPRC staff are collaborating with officials from the Department of Justice, the Department of Navy, and the VA to develop strategies to efficiently address the surge in records demands associated with this litigation.

We will continue to send regular updates to Congress regarding our efforts to eliminate the entire backlog and restore service to pre-pandemic levels or better. Thank you for your continued support of NPRC and our Nation's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Debra Steidel Wall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

DEBRA STEIDEL WALL
Acting Archivist of the United States